

INTELLIFAX 9

INFORMATION REPORT

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COUNTRY Korea

DATE DISTR. 9 AUG 61

SUBJECT Mining of Tantalum, Beryllium, and Monazite in North Korea

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SUPPLEMENT TO REPORT NO. 25X1X

1. In June 1948, the North Korean government set up a national office called the Tan Nok (Tantalum) (탄석) Mine,* under the Ministry of Industry. The office engaged in exploitation of tantalum in the second district, Haksari (127-26, 38-15), Kumhwa-myon (127-28, 38-18), Kumhwa County, Kangwon. The mining methods used were to dynamite quartz from the mountains and then crush the quartz rock in order to extract the particles of tantalum from the broken surfaces. According to a technician engaged in the work, the tantalum was very fine, and 500 workers could extract only two or three matchboxes full** in a 15-day period.
2. The entire output of the mine was carried by the manager of the mining office in person to the office of the Ministry of Industry in Pyongyang. The tantalum was reported to be valued at several hundred thousand North Korean won per kilogram. The miners believed that their entire production was exported to the USSR.
3. In May 1950, in response to a directive from the Ministry of Industry, the mine suddenly suspended its operations on tantalum. It continued to be called the Tantalum Mine, but the office explained to the mine workers that it would now exploit beryllium,*** which was important for the manufacture of atomic bombs. Mining operations were initiated in the mountainous areas of Kaenja-ri (개자리), Wonnam-myon (127-38, 38-18), Kumhwa County; Tanok-ni (탄옥리), Sangso-myon (127-38, 38-12), Hwachon County; and Chadung-ni (127-25, 38-08), So-myon (127-25, 38-09), Kumhwa County. The quantities of beryllium at these sites and in other portions of Kangwon Province is considered inexhaustible.
4. At each of these sites, about three times as many workers were employed as had been engaged in tantalum exploitation. Local North Korean Labor Party cells drafted the poorer farmers forcibly to work in the mines. At Tanok-ni there were about 15,000 workers daily, over a thousand at Chadung-ni, and over 5,000 at Kaenja-ri. Approximately fifty administrative personnel were attached to each mine.
5. The method of extracting beryllium was similar to that used for tantalum:

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the mountain sides were dynamited and the chunks of rock thus dislodged were collected. In this case, however, no breaking up of chunks was undertaken, but the rocks as they appeared after dynamiting were collected and placed in straw bags. All production was shipped to Pyongyang daily, and workers were therefore unable to form an estimate of the amount of material actually handled. The beryllium was valued at 900 North Korean won per kilogram.****

6. In order to raise production, workers at the mines were paid a fixed wage plus bonus for overtime and for large output. The average wage was 1500 North Korean won**** per month, and in addition workers were given adequate quantities of rice and other necessities for living.
7. Operation of the beryllium mines continued uninterrupted even by UN air raids. Workers were forcibly mobilized for the mines after the air raids commenced, and production stopped only when the UN forces were about to capture the area.
8. Exploitation of monazite deposits was carried on in South Pyongan Province in Taedong County (approximately 125-14, 39-11) and on the Sunan River (125-11, 39-12), in Kwanghae Province in Sinchon County (approximately 125-22, 38-25), Anak County (approximately 125-26, 38-35), Changyon County (approximately 125-17, 38-07), Honggupo (124-47, 38-11), Songwa County (approximately 125-12, 38-10), and Ulliyul County (approximately 125-16, 38-29); and in North Pyongan Province in Cholsan County (approximately 124-40, 39-45), Uija (124-32, 40-12), Tasado (124-56, 39-51), Namsi (125-14, 39-53), Kangsi (124-28, 39-59), Kangrye (126-36, 40-53), Yongbyon County (approximately 125-56, 40-03), Pyohyangsan (126-13, 39-53), Paechon County (approximately 125-25, 39-49), and Unsan County (approximately 125-52, 40-06). The most productive region was Cholsan County, but supplies of monazite sand are said to be inexhaustible on almost all rivers in North Korea.
9. The method of exploitation was for all farmers and laborers, male and female, in a given area to be mobilized at a selected site on a river and work the sand in the area. Three methods of handling were used: sifting the dry sand through rough sieves; pouring wet sand through cloth so that the water drained out and the sand remained; and using motors for water cleaning. The most commonly employed method was the first. In addition to the mobilized labor, personnel from North Korean labor Party groups and social and political organizations gathered in various localities and worked over monazite sand.**** For example, a designated number of the people of Sunan would assemble daily and work until they had accumulated a set quantity of monazite. These labor parties and the regular exploitation continued from early 1949 until the end of August 1950, when the work was stopped because of UN air raids.
10. The general headquarters for monazite exploitation was the Mining Control Bureau of the Ministry of Industry, in Sungyo-ri, Pyongyang. It was formed in 1949 as a direct responsibility of KIM Ch'aek, then Minister of Industry. The number of laborers and the amount of production under this bureau are unknown because of the general participation in monazite work. All monazite products were packed in straw or hemp bags, of 40 kilograms each, and exported to the USSR, some by plane (from Pyongyang), some by ship from Wonsan and Chongjin. It was estimated that approximately 9,600,000 kilograms of monazite were shipped to the USSR during 1949 and 1950. An agreement was believed to have been made with the USSR at the end of 1948 that the North Koreans would receive tanks (at what rate of compensation was unknown) in return for the monazite. KIM Ch'aek, who was one of the North Korean party which concluded the agreement in Moscow, returned to Pyongyang in early 1949, and 400 Soviet tanks arrived from the USSR at the end of February. These were formed into the 105 Tank Troop at Sansa-ri, Pyongyang.

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Comment: For previous discussion of this installation, see

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Comment: This amount evidently refers to the finished product.

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Comment: The Korean word is *chusok* (추석).

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Comment: The rate of exchange for North Korean won before the 1950 war was approximately 600 to one U.S. dollar.

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Comment: This intensive monazite production program involved considerable groups and was strongly urged by the North Korean government on all communities.

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Comment: A kwan is 3.75 kilograms.

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